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**WE MUST
NEGOTIATE PEACE
IN VIETNAM**

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By Senator J. W. Fulbright

CPYRGHT

America is a Great Society and it is becoming greater. Our people enjoy greater material abundance, with greater personal opportunity and human dignity, than any people have ever known in the history of the human race. There is, to be sure, much unfinished business in our society, but the fact remains that we are a great and fundamentally decent nation; we know it—or ought to—and the world knows it.

At times, however, we act as though we did not believe in our own greatness, as though our prestige were constantly in jeopardy, requiring unending exertions to prove to the world that we are indeed a great and powerful nation. We are told, for example, that we must beat the Russians to the moon, that we must build the world's fastest airplane, that we must maintain our pressures against Castro, that we must faithfully discharge dubious commitments, not primarily because these actions are considered essential in themselves but more because it is believed that if we did not do these things, our prestige, which is to say, our reputation for greatness, would be hopelessly compromised.

In the case of Vietnam, our honor and prestige are indeed involved, but they are involved principally because we laid them on the line and did so in a legally uncertain and politically casual way. Legally, under a reasonable interpretation of the SEATO treaty, we have agreed to act against external Communist attack in accordance

with our constitutional processes but are obligated only to *consult* with our allies in the event of subversion from outside. We have neither the obligation nor the right to intervene in a civil war. If, prior to American intervention, the war in South Vietnam was *essentially* a civil war, as I believe to be the case, then the legal basis of American involvement is dubious. Practically and politically, whatever the legalities, the all-out commitment to South Vietnam was made almost casually, by a series of minor escalations of the American involvement, many of which were accompanied by statements that the war was not our war and would have to be won or lost by the South Vietnamese themselves. Only when they were about to lose the war did the United States take it over.

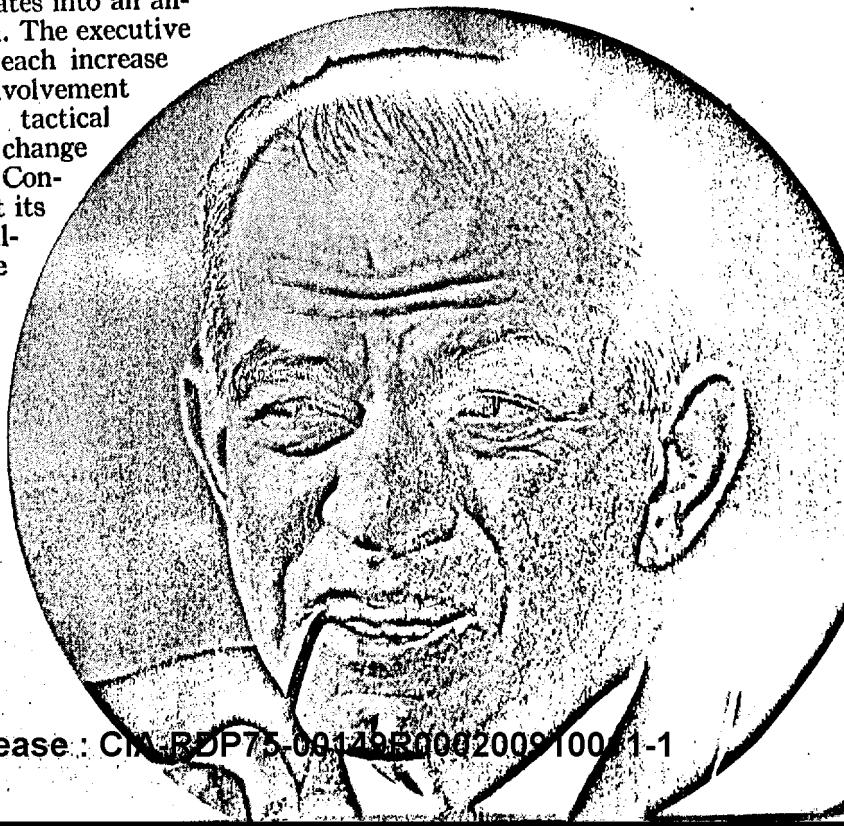
The executive and the Congress must share responsibility for the casual way in which the United States committed its honor and prestige to an unstable and intransigent regime which refuses to negotiate with its enemies and may yet drag the United States into an all-out war with China. The executive tended to explain each increase in the American involvement in Vietnam as a tactical step rather than a change of policy, while the Congress failed to meet its general responsibility of holding the executive to account and the Senate failed to assert its constitutional

powers of "advice and consent" in the field of foreign policy.

It is my hope that the hearings on Vietnam recently held before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and future proceedings now under consideration will help to correct past omissions on the part of the Congress. There is some evidence, for example, that we are now expanding our commitment to Thailand in the same disorderly way that we became so deeply involved in Vietnam. There is still time, however, for the Senate to insist that any new commitment to Thailand be contracted in full accord with our constitutional procedures, including full and frank debate.

We have committed our prestige to an unwise degree in Vietnam, and we have suffered accordingly some loss of prestige, but I do not think that America's greatness is questioned in the world, and I certainly do not think that strident behavior is the best way for a nation to prove its greatness or salve its damaged pride. Indeed, in nations as in individuals, bellicosity is a

One measure of a democracy's strength is the freedom of its citizens to speak out—to dissent from the popular view. Although the editors often disagree with the opinions expressed in Speaking Out, they dedicate the series to that freedom.



CPYRGHT

mark of weakness and self-doubt rather than strength and self-assurance. There is something appropriate and admirable about a small or weak country standing up defiantly to a big and powerful country; such behavior confers upon the small country an assurance which it needs to nourish its dignity and self-respect. The same behavior on the part of a big nation is grotesque, marking it as a bully. The true mark of greatness is not assertiveness but magnanimity. "Magnanimity in politics," said Edmund Burke, "is not seldom the truest wisdom; and a great empire and little minds go ill together."

It is precisely because of America's great strength and prestige that we can afford to be—that indeed it is in our interest to be—magnanimous in Vietnam. If the Viet Cong or North Vietnam were to take the initiative in offering substantive concessions, they could plausibly be regarded as having been intimidated by American power. If we were to take the lead in suggesting peace terms involving a compromise with the Viet

Cong, many people would suppose that the American people had grown doubtful about the war—which is probably true—but no one could seriously believe that the United States had been frightened or intimidated into submission by a small and poor country in southeast Asia.

APR 9 1986

SPEAKING OUT

Nationalism is the strongest single political force in the world today. In most of the emerging countries the nationalist movements have been non-Communist, with the result that Communist efforts at subversion have for the most part been unsuccessful. It is a tragic fact, but nonetheless a fact, that in Vietnam the effective nationalist movement is controlled by Communists. For this reason above all others I recommend that we state plainly and directly what President Johnson and Ambassador Harriman have hinted: that we acknowledge the Viet Cong as a belligerent which has said that it will not negotiate with the Viet Cong, to induce the persuasion in Saigon to induce the South Vietnamese government, in South Vietnam to do so.

It has been said that the Viet Cong is entitled to no special negotiating position because it is, after all, only one of many factions in South Vietnam. It is, however, a rather special faction inasmuch as it is the one with which we are at war. The British did not regard George Washington and his fellow revolutionaries as the only faction in the 13 colonies, much less a "legitimate" or legal one; they made peace with them because, assisted by the French, they were the ones who were fighting them in the field. Moreover, and more important, however much we may regret it, the Viet Cong is something more than an organized group of terrorists. It is, I think, a genuinely nationalist as well as a Communist movement, as evidenced by its impressive military performance over a long period against heavy odds.

I suggest further, in this connection, that we use all available channels to persuade the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong that, whatever the future political complexion of Vietnam, Communist or non-Communist, united or divided, it can enjoy a secure and independent existence and normal relations with the United States as long as it respects the independence of its neighbors and as long as it upholds its own independence of China.

Such a settlement would not constitute a victory in the traditional sense; but neither would it represent a decision, as has been suggested, to "scuttle and run." It would, quite simply, represent a compromise, including, as any compromise must, concessions by the United States. A concession, however, is not a humiliation and may indeed be turned to one's own advantage, as General de Gaulle demonstrated by giving freedom to Algeria and as Khrushchev demonstrated by proclaiming himself a peacemaker while yielding to the American ultimatum in the Cuban missile crisis. The concessions we must make are necessary as an act of common sense in a tragic situation; as Walter Lippmann has written, ". . . a display of common sense by a proud and imperious nation would be a good moral investment for the future." And as George Kennan said in his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February:

"I would submit there is more respect to be won in the opinion of the world by a resolute and courageous liquidation of unsound positions than in the most stubborn pursuit of extravagant or unpromising objectives."

It may be difficult indeed to persuade the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong to enter a negotiation along the lines indicated. They have little reason to trust the Western nations, having been betrayed by the French in 1946, who recognized Vietnam as a "free state" and promised a referendum on its unity but then tried to reassert their colonial authority, and by Diem and his American sponsors in 1955 when we encouraged him in his refusal to hold the elections provided for by the Geneva agreements. It will be necessary to show our good faith as well as to insist on the good faith of the other side. It may be that at first we will be rebuffed and, if so, we can do no better than to restate our assurances, patiently and repeatedly, conducting ourselves in a manner befitting a great and mature nation. There is an unacknowledged presence in all that we think and say and do in connection with Vietnam; it is the presence of China. We wage war against the Viet Cong and North Vietnam, but we regard them as instruments of China, and it is China that we consider to be the real threat to the security of southeast Asia. If it were not for our

SPEAKING OUT

concern with China and what she might do, it would probably be an easier matter to come to terms with our enemies in Vietnam. Our prospects in Vietnam cannot therefore be separated from our attitude toward China and China's attitude toward us.

United Nations Secretary General U Thant recently described China as a country "obsessed with fear and suspicion," a country undergoing a kind of "nervous breakdown." U Thant's words suggest the need for Americans to make a critical choice in their attitude toward China. On the one hand, we can treat her as persons with "nervous breakdowns" were treated in centuries past; we can throw her into the figurative snake pit of world politics, treating her as an insane and predatory creature, an outlaw with whom there can be no accommodation. On the other hand, we can treat China by the more civilized standards deriving from our modern understanding of human behavior; while resisting any aggressive act she commits, we can at the same time treat China as a respected member of the world community now going through a period of dangerous chauvinism and warranting our best efforts to rehabilitate her to the world community.

I hope that America will make the second choice. I hope that in its attitude toward China, America will

act with the magnanimity that befits a great nation by following the advice of Pope Paul, who said in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly: "Your vocation is to make brothers not only of some, but of all peoples, a difficult undertaking, indeed; but this it is, your most noble undertaking. . . . We will go further, and say: strive to bring back among you any who have separated themselves, and study the right method of uniting to your pact of brotherhood, in honor and loyalty, those who do not yet share in it."

The hatred of the Chinese Communists for America is something more than the normal political hostility of one nation toward another whose policies thwart the realization of its ambitions. America is hated as the leading nation of the West, as the center and purveyor of a civilization which has had a devastating effect on China and subjected it to such humiliations as few great nations in history have undergone. I am inclined to the view that China's irrational and hostile behavior has a great deal to do with ancient grievances and that the Chinese regard their quarrel with America not only as an ideological struggle but also as an ultimate historical reckoning for China's humiliations during the past century at the hands of Western nations.

It is impossible in a few words to describe the deep and bitter humiliation inflicted upon the Chinese, a

tions as a trustworthy and responsible partner. A great deal is at stake, however, and it would be tragic folly if we did not do what little we can to rehabilitate China to the world community. The West, to be sure, must defend itself against irrational and aggressive Chinese behavior, but in the long run we can only hope to be safe in the world with a powerful and dynamic China by drawing her out of isolation.

Treated with friendliness and respect, China may be brought over in time to see that the "barbarians" of the West are in fact less barbaric than they seem. As Secretary General U Thant pointed out, China is going through a difficult period; it befits us as a great nation to act upon this fact with understanding and magnanimity. If we can bring ourselves to do so, we will be on the way to a solution of the great problems that beset us in eastern Asia. The prospects for an honorable and lasting peace in Vietnam, where everything to do with China and its relatives in the outside world, because China is the greatest nation of Asia. It is not within our power to make it otherwise, but it is within our power to repair some of the damage done by the arrogance and condescension of the past.

Today China stands isolated, mistrustful and hostile toward the outside world. Her illustrious history of 4,000 years has contributed to the view of herself as a superior civilization set upon by hostile barbarians. In the wake of so tragic and unique a national experience, one can hardly be sanguine about immediate prospects for drawing China into the community of na-

great and civilized people, by imperialist nations, including Russia and, to a degree, America. Some thing of its flavor, however, can be gotten from a young Chinese engineer's account of his return from Europe to China in 1913 with his Belgian wife and son. Referring to his arrival in Shanghai, where Western interests owned the hotels, restaurants and other public facilities, he wrote:

In Shanghai it was agony, for there it was only too plain that in my own country I was nothing but an inferior, despised being. There were parks and restaurants and hotels I could not enter, although she could. I had no rights on the soil of a Chinese city which did not belong to the Chinese; she had rights by reason of something called skin. We boarded the English steamer from Shanghai to Hankow; the first class was for Europeans only, and there was no other steamer. Marguerite leaned her arms on the railings and stared at the river. She was in first class, with our son. I went second class. I had insisted it should be so. "It is too hot for you here below."

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